

MILITARY DECISION MAKING PROCESS AND 21ST CENTURY WARFARE

MDMP IN 3D

MAJOR EDWARD C. WILSON

All planning processes are based on a set of stated and unstated assumptions about the nature of the problem the process is trying to solve. The seven-step military decision-making process (MDMP) is no different. In an article written at the School of Advanced Military Studies titled “COIN Modeling: An MDMP Technique for Planning Counterinsurgency Campaigns,” author Samuel Hales said that the MDMP was originally designed for force-on-force battles between conventional combined armies. For the sake of this article I will make one critical assumption that will guide the rest of my work, which is that the asymmetric environment and the insurgent threat we face today is the face of warfare for the 21st century. The fluid, asymmetric threat environment we face today in Iraq will be quickly adopted by our enemies of the future. Simply put, asymmetric threats or techniques are a version of not fighting fair. This can include the use of surprise in all its operational and

strategic dimensions and the use of weapons in ways unplanned by the United States. Not fighting fair also includes the prospect of an opponent designing a strategy that fundamentally alters the terrain on which a conflict is fought. Insurgency warfare is a social movement that is willing to use force to achieve a socio-political end state within their perceived community. The aspects effective insurgencies touch incorporate diplomatic, information, military and economic means, and they do not present themselves in a linear fashion. The traditional courses of action (COAs) defined and developed in steps 3 thru 6 of the MDMP are devised to focus on specific pieces of military equipment or organizations as opposed to social and political aspects associated with a population.

Does the MDMP, as described in FM 5-0, adequately address challenges our battle staffs at the battalion and above will continue to face in the future? Our military clearly needs a tool that can



Mass Communication Specialist Second Class Kitt Amaritnant, USN

Soldiers with the 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, discuss a plan of action before a mission in Baghdad.

effectively analyze the dynamics associated with the threat I have described. This process must facilitate planning as part of a cycle of continuously improving and adjusting COAs. The MDMP, as it exists today, is clearly not up to the task of supporting complex problem solving in such a dynamic and asymmetric threat environment. A staff process that is efficient, agile and incorporates a technological solution to visualizing the battle space is clearly an area we need to explore as we prepare for warfare in the 21st century.

We clearly need to take a critical look at the MDMP process and develop a means that is as applicable to the asymmetric environment as the MDMP was to the conventional fight.

The MDMP uses an analytical rationale to problem solving. It does not build on or incorporate experience and expertise, but rather builds on these analytical processes and is not a fluid or adaptive process. The seven steps of the MDMP each begin with inputs that build on previous steps. Each step, in turn, has outputs that drive subsequent steps. The process is detailed, deliberate, sequential and very time consuming. In the environment I have just described, time is a luxury our military can ill afford. As Napoleon was once quoted as saying: “You can ask me for anything you like, except time.”

Time being the most critical of all things, we need to do better. Time pressures which exist in all manners of warfare, but are especially prevalent in the counterinsurgency (COIN) fight, degrade the MDMP significantly. Although there are provisions for a time constrained environment, this process is clearly supported by omission of steps from the original process. The commander performs many of them mentally or with less staff involvement. Thus, the abbreviated process is much more directive and limits staff flexibility and initiative. It is also less likely to explore all available options to the commander and increases the risk to an operation by overlooking key factors or options the staff may have otherwise addressed in each COA. Given the challenges we are destined to face in the COIN environment, a process that can only be made better by becoming worse is indeed no option at all.

We clearly need to take a critical look at the MDMP process and develop a means that is as applicable to the asymmetric environment as the MDMP was to the conventional fight. Leaders today need to uncover expertise among their staffs, know their people and have dedicated staff members assigned against asymmetric problem sets. Everything from the geography, buildings, media, religious influences, people and equipment must be focused on. Staff members must consider these dimensions collectively in developing and assessing friendly and enemy COAs and then present a recommendation to the commander. The key to a good solution lies in the ability to correctly assess a specific situation considering all the circumstances, especially since this assessment will guide the commander’s judgment about what is a good COA.

My final point, and the one that influenced the title, is that while the process itself clearly needs to be brought into the 21st century, so too do the tools we incorporate into it. Often, the most requested tool in any version of the MDMP process is that which

helps participants visualize battle space, such as an automated version of the terrain, detailed electronic map or enemy situational template (SITE MP).

Some means to rapidly sketch and disseminate the base COA is imperative. In order to enhance and streamline the process, it is clear that technology must play a key role as well. We currently have virtual simulations for small arms threat scenarios, tank battles and systems such as the engagement skills trainer (EST) and tank and aviation

simulations that we incorporate into our training programs every day. We need to explore this dimension one level deeper and provide for tools that make visualization of the battle space easier. A technological advancement in the form of three dimensional modeling could easily streamline the MDMP. In fact, without much stretch of the imagination, it could perhaps even eliminate COA development, analysis and comparison (steps 3-5) altogether.

The threat environment in the 21st century will clearly continue to be associated with the asymmetric environment and the insurgent based threat. We must place a greater emphasis on the execution phase of future operations and the resources allocated against each of these priorities. The planning phase must be streamlined and compressed as well in order to help facilitate this. A staff process that is efficient, agile and incorporates a technological solution to visualizing the battle space is clearly a path we need to explore. The irony here is that these are not new concepts at all, and in fact General George S. Patton, Jr. once stated that, “Execution, rather than planning, amounts to 95 percent of mission accomplishment.” He also directed that army-level orders “should not exceed a page and a half of typewritten text with the back of the page reserved for a sketch map.” With a stronger process specifically designed to meet the complexities anticipated in future warfare and incorporation of technological tools to facilitate the process, our military can easily overcome some very basic challenges to the MDMP that seem almost insurmountable today.

Major Edward C. Wilson is assigned to the Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC), U.S. Army Central (USARCENT) G2. He is currently assigned as the battalion executive officer with the Special Troops Battalion in Kuwait. His previous assignments include serving with the 1st Armored Division, where he served as DS MI company commander and the G2 collection manager for Task Force Falcon in Kosovo. Other USARCENT assignments include serving with the G2, C2 and C3 training sections and assignment to Camp Buehring, Kuwait. He worked to develop the POI for the battalion and brigade battle staff seminars offered during the RSOI process in support of OIF, emphasizing counterinsurgency operations and counter-IED training. Additional training includes work with the Joint IED Task Force and Task Force Troy at Camp Victory, Iraq, graduation from the COIN Academy in Taji, Iraq, and service as an instructor at Camp Buehring, Kuwait.

A list of references for this article are on file and available through *Infantry Magazine*.
